

Wilmington University, DHSS to Train 1,000 Staff Members in Trauma-Informed Approaches

In Partnership with Wilmington University, DHSS Begins Yearlong Initiative to Train 1,000 Staff Members in Trauma-Informed Approaches to Assessing and Meeting the Needs of Clients

NEW CASTLE (March 12, 2018) – The Department of Health and Social Services is partnering with Wilmington University to train more than 1,000 frontline DHSS staff in better assessing and addressing the needs of clients statewide, many of whom have experienced trauma in their lives, during the kickoff of a yearlong Trauma-Informed Approach initiative.

Wilmington University's nine-week training session for 26 supervisors and trainers from the DHSS Divisions of Social Services, Child Support Services and State Service Centers, began in January with the support of the DHSS Division of Management Services. The 54 total hours of training blends face-to-face classroom learning at Wilmington University's New Castle campus with online learning at each student's pace.

The sessions are led by Dr. Debra Berke, associate professor and director of the Wilmington University College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Marilyn Siebold, an adjunct professor at the university. During the weekly training sessions, participants learn the content of three core Trauma-Informed Approaches certificate courses. They also develop a 12.5-hour training module that they will use to train more

than 1,000 front-line employees across the three divisions.

“Among our divisions with the greatest level of direct client contact, our goal is to create a workforce that understands what trauma is, how it affects people across their lifespans, and the most effective ways to assess and meet our clients’ needs,” said DHSS Secretary Dr. Kara Odom Walker, a board-certified family physician. “This training is an important step in supporting and promoting recovery for our clients who have experienced trauma so they can build resilience and learn to thrive in their communities.”

Renée Beaman, director of the Division of State Service Centers and one of the trainees in the first round, is leading the initiative for DHSS. “The goal of this trauma-informed approach is to increase effectiveness in our services, which can produce improved engagement, partnership and outcomes for the individuals and families we serve,” she said.

The landmark Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, conducted in 1995 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente, found that, among the 17,000 participants, more than 60 percent had been exposed to at least one adverse event, such as divorce of a parent, witnessing neighborhood violence, living with an adult with a mental illness or addiction issue, or other socioeconomic hardship. The ACE Study found that traumatic life events in childhood affect survivors across their lifespan and lead to such challenges as family dysfunction, school failure, physical illnesses, psychiatric conditions, substance use disorder, exposure to risky relationships and behaviors, homelessness, criminal activity, unemployment or under-employment, and premature death, as many as 20 years too soon. A growing body of research shows that adversity is so common as to be nearly universal.

“In addition to preparatory education for individuals interested in working within social services and behavioral

health at all levels, Wilmington University is committed to workforce development and offers continuing education to those currently providing social and behavioral health-related services,” Berke noted. “This partnership with DHSS is one example of how the university is investing in the lives of Delawareans through the enhancement of organizational capacity and resources. The ultimate goals are to promote health and well-being and prevent adverse outcomes for individuals, families, communities, and society.”

In Delaware, Governor John Carney’s Family Services Cabinet Council is addressing adverse childhood experiences as a way to reduce the impact of violence in Wilmington. In the City of Wilmington, 60.5 percent of children have been exposed to at least one ACE, compared with 47.9 percent nationally. In addition, 28 percent of children in Wilmington have been exposed to two more ACEs, compared with 22.6 percent of children nationally. Across Delaware, 50.4 percent of children have been exposed to at least one ACE and 23 percent have been exposed to two or more ACEs.

Professor Marilyn Siebold also leads the training sessions. “The energy displayed by everyone involved in this project has been enormous,” she observed. “They have a genuine and contagious enthusiasm for building the capacity to use a trauma-informed lens in their professional and personal lives. As both service providers and service recipients, it’s exciting to know that we are part of the growing, national recognition of why it matters to be trauma-informed.”

Kristin Flynn, an undergraduate psychology major, is assisting Siebold with the training in a spring 2018 internship. Flynn has completed the coursework for Wilmington University’s Trauma-Informed Approaches certificate and has been accepted to graduate school at Utrecht University in The Netherlands. Flynn will help to identify resources to use in the training and help to design the assessments used to measure increases in participants’ knowledge, skills and attitudes. Keisha Daniels, a master’s degree student in the university’s Applied

Family Science program and a DHSS employee, was chosen to participate in the training by her division director. Daniels will use this training experience as part of her Applied Family Science practicum.

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The Department of Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of life of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations.

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